**Thesis Statements**

“**A thesis is** an idea. It is a thought that you have arrived at about your evidence…”

**A strong thesis is** a theory about the meaning and significance of your evidence that would not have been immediately obvious to your readers.

**A weak thesis** either makes no claim or makes a claim that doesn’t need proving, such as a statement of fact or an opinion with which virtually all of your readers would most likely agree before reading your essay.

In order to work as a thesis, an idea needs to possess at least the following characteristics:

* The thesis of an analytical paper is an idea about what some feature or features of your subject *means*
* A thesis should be an idea in need of argument; that is, it should not be a statement of fact or an idea with which most readers would already agree.

**Examples of effective thesis statements:**

1. If opponents of cosmetic surgery are too quick to dismiss those who claim great psychological benefits, protesters are far too willing to dismiss those who raise concerns. Cosmetic surgery might make individual people happier, but in the aggregate it makes life worse for everyone.
2. There is a connection between the idea of place and the reality of cellular telephones. It is not encouraging. Places are unique—or at least we like to believe they are—and we strive to experience them as a kind of engagement with particulars. Cell phones are precisely the opposite.
3. Although women more readily cry in contemporary films, the men, by not crying, seem to win the audience’s favor.

**Making a Thesis Evolve (in brief):**

Working thesis -🡪 find confirming evidence -🡪 find complicating evidence -🡪 revise thesis -🡪 repeat the process

**Six Steps for Making a Thesis Evolve:**

**1.** Formulate an idea about your subject. This working thesis should be some claim about the meaning of your evidence that is good enough to get you started.

**2.** Locate evidence. See how far you can make this thesis go in accounting for this evidence. Use the thesis to explain as much of your evidence as it reasonably can.

**3.** Identify evidence that is not adequately accounted for by the thesis.

**4.** Make explicit the apparent mismatch between the thesis and any unaccounted evidence. Explain how and why some pieces of evidence do not fit the thesis.

**5.** Reshape your claim to accommodate the evidence that doesn’t fit. This will mean rewording your thesis to resolve or explain apparently contradictions.

**6.** Repeat steps two, three, four, and five several times, until you are satisfied that the thesis statement accounts for your evidence as fully and accurately as possible.

**Five Kinds of Weak Thesis Statements and How to Fix Them**

**Weak Thesis Type 1: The Thesis Makes No Claim**

*-Problem example*: This paper addresses the characteristics of a good corporate manager.

**Solution: Raise specific issues for the essay to explore.**

*-Solution example:* The very trait that makes for an effective corporate manager—the drive to succeed—can also make the leader domineering and, therefore, ineffective.

**Weak Thesis Type 2: The Thesis is Obviously True or is a Statement of Fact**

*-Problem example:* The jean industry targets its advertisements to appeal to young adults.

**Solution: Find some avenue of inquiry—a question about the facts or an issue raised by them. Make an assertion with which it would be possible for readers to disagree.**

*-Solution example:* By inventing new terms, such as “loose fit” and “relaxed fit,” the jean industry has attempted to normalize, even glorify, its product for an older and fatter generation.

**Weak Thesis Type 3: The Thesis Restates Conventional Wisdom**

*-Problem example:* An important part of one’s college education is learning to better understand others’ points of view.

**Solution: Seek to complicate—see more than one point of view on—your subject. Avoid conventional wisdom unless you can qualify it or introduce a fresh perspective on it.**

*-Solution example:* While an important part of one’s college education is learning to better understand others’ points of view, a persistent danger is that the students will simply be required to substitute the teacher’s answers for the ones they grew up uncritically believing.

**Weak Thesis Type 4: The Thesis Bases Its Claim on Personal Conviction**

*-Problem example:* Although I agree with Jeane Kirkpatrick’s argument that environmentalists and business should work together to ensure the ecological future of the world, and that this cooperation is beneficial for both sides, the indisputable fact is that environmental considerations should always be a part of any decision that is made. Any individual, if he looks deeply enough into his soul, knows what is right and what is wrong. The environment should be protected because it is the right thing to do, not because someone is forcing you to do it.

**Solution: Try on other points of view honestly and disapassionately; treat your ideas as hypotheses to be tested rather than obvious truths.**

*-Solution example:* Although I agree with Jeane Kirkpatrick’s argument that environmentalists and business should work together to ensure the ecological future of the world, her argument undervalues the necessity of pressuring businesses to attend to environmental concerns that may not benefit them in the short run.

**Weak Thesis Type 5: The Thesis Makes an Overly Broad Claim**

*-Problem examples:* Violent revolutions have had both positive and negative results for man.

*Othello* is a play about love and jealousy.

**Solution: Convert broad categories and generic claims to more specific, more qualified assertions; find ways to bring out the complexity of your subject.**

*-Solution examples:* Although violent revolutions begin to redress long-standing social inequities, they often do so at the cost of long-term economic dysfunction and the suffering that attends it.

-Although *Othello* appears to attack jealousy, it also supports the skepticism of the jealous characters over the naivete of the lovers.